

# Covcas Bulletin

**Conflits et Droits de l'Homme au Caucase**  
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**Conflicts & Human Rights in the Caucasus**  
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		<p><b>T</b>he Abkhazian conflict has been the subject of an intense diplomatic activity during January: the discussions of Valerii Loshchinin, special envoy of President Putin, last January 9<sup>th</sup>, with the leaders of Sokhum focused on a resumption of negotiations between Georgians and Abkhazians, broken off since Abkhazians had demanded the preliminary withdrawal of Georgian troops from the high terrain of Kodori. The following day, the meeting of Heidi Tagliavini, special envoy of the UN Secretary General</p>

with Prime Minister Gennadi Gagulia, led the meetings' agenda of the council of coordination and the "Friends of General Secretary" - a group consisting of five countries coming to search a settlement to the conflict.

Finally, the CEI Summit of Kiev did not renew the mandate of peacekeeping Russian forces, established in the conflict area since 1994. Georgia had several times refused the renewal of the mandate of these forces. This time, despite the recommendations of the American envoy for the conflicts of South Caucasia, Rudolphe Perina, not to stop for the time being these troops' mandate, Georgia seemed tempted to put an end to this intervention of Russia that is in opposition to the general tendency of Georgian policy to get Russians out of the Georgian territory.

## SOUTH OSSETIA

**T**he relations between Georgia and South Ossetia, at a standstill for several years, have taken a new turning with the meeting between the special correspondent of Chevanarze, Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, and the president of Ossetia, Eduard Kokoyty.

However, at the end of the meeting, the optimism aired by both parties has given way to qualms, as the inhabitants of the Ossetian village of Dodoeti have been the witnesses of a deployment of heavy artillery vehicles. The uncertainty continues to weigh upon the future relations between the Georgian authorities and the South Ossetia's ones.

## RESUMES

### GEORGIE

**A**près avoir longtemps nié la présence de camps d'entraînement pour combattants tchéchènes et arabes dans les gorges de Pankissi, les autorités géorgiennes se sont enfin dévoilées ce 14 janvier à travers les aveux du porte-parole du Ministère de la Sécurité Nationale, Nika Laliashvili. Ce dernier a déclaré aux journalistes qu'un tel camp existait jusqu'aux opérations

de démantèlement entreprises par les autorités ; il a en outre précisé que ce camp d'entraînement servait à l'enseignement de la fabrication d'explosives et de poisons comme le ricin. Laliashvili a également affirmé que c'est le réseau al Qaeda qui contrôlait l'acheminement des fonds aux terroristes de Pankissi, que « la majorité » des arabes et tchéchènes auraient quitté les gorges en août 2002. Cette version est contestée par les autorités russes qui considèrent que de nombreux combattants se trouvent toujours sur place, et que les autres étant prévenus par les autorités géorgiennes de l'opération de démantèlement avant la date de celui-ci, ont eu le temps de fuir vers des abris d'où ils sortiront dès la fonte des neiges. L'insistance de la Russie pour débarrasser les Gorges de Pankissi des bandes de tchéchènes armés s'est toujours heurtée au déni géorgien de l'existence même de ces derniers. Aujourd'hui, l'aveu de l'officiel géorgien corrobore avec les informations de la presse occidentale sur des attentats préparés par un groupe de chimistes dans des laboratoires clandestins de Pankissi.

C'est dans ce contexte de soupçons qu'une nouvelle crise pointe à l'horizon dans les relations Géorgie - Russie à l'occasion d'une menace géorgienne de fermer l'espace aérien géorgien aux avions russes, et de restreindre la fourniture de matériels aux bases russes. La presse a lié cette menace à l'ouverture de la part de la Russie du chemin de fer Sokhumi (Abkhazie) - Sotchi (Russie). Les attaques racistes contre des personnalités politiques n'ont jamais cessé d'exister dans la vie politique géorgienne ; une nouvelle fois, un député, Guram Sharadze, de dévoiler les origines étrangères de plusieurs de ses opposants qu'il considère comme indignes du nom de leur parti « mouvement national ».

La politique ultra nationaliste de Gamsakhourdia, le prédécesseur de Chevardnadze, envers les éléments non géorgiens avait précipité la sécession de l'Abkhazie et de l'Ossétie du Sud, et avait créé une atmosphère d'affrontement dans la région arménienne du Djavakhk. Aujourd'hui, le pouvoir géorgien veut créer un état nation centralisé dans un pays formé de multiples minorités, tout en évitant de

sanctionner ces attitudes de racisme et d'intolérance dans la société et la vie politique géorgienne. La communauté internationale devra surveiller de près ces relents d'ostracisme et de xénophobie trop présents dans la presse et le discours des hommes politiques.

## ABKHAZIE

**L**e conflit abkhaze a fait l'objet d'une intense activité diplomatique pendant le mois de janvier : les discussions de Valerii Loshchinin, envoyé spécial du Président Putin, le 9 janvier dernier, avec les dirigeants de Sokhumi ont porté sur une reprise des négociations entre Géorgiens et Abkhazes, interrompues depuis que les Abkhazes avaient exigé le retrait préalable des troupes géorgiennes de la partie haute de la gorge de Kodori. Le lendemain, la rencontre de Heidi Tagliavini, l'envoyé spécial du secrétaire Général de l'ONU avec le Premier ministre Gennadi Gagulia ont abordé le calendrier des rencontres du conseil de coordination et des « Amis du Secrétaire Général » ce groupe de cinq pays réunis dans la recherche d'un règlement du conflit. Enfin, le sommet de la CEI de Kiev, n'a pas renouvelé le mandat des forces russes de maintien de la paix, installées dans la zone du conflit depuis 1994. La Géorgie avait refusé à plusieurs reprises le renouvellement de ces forces ; cette fois, en dépit des recommandations de l'envoyé américain pour les conflits du Caucase du Sud, Rudolphe Perina, de ne pas arrêter dans l'immédiat le mandat de ces troupes, la Géorgie paraissait tentée de mettre un terme à cette intervention de la Russie qui va à l'encontre de la tendance générale de la politique géorgienne de sortir les russes du territoire de la Géorgie.

## OSSETIE DU SUD

**L**es relations entre la Géorgie et l'Ossétie du sud, au point mort depuis plusieurs années, ont pris une nouvelle tournure avec la rencontre entre l'envoyé spécial du

Président Chevardnadze, Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, et le président de l'Ossétie, Eduard Kokoyty. Cependant, à l'issue de l'entretien, l'optimisme affiché par les deux parties a laissé la place à des inquiétudes, puisque les habitants du village ossète de Dodoeti ont été témoins d'un déploiement de véhicules d'artillerie lourde. L'incertitude continue de peser sur l'avenir des relations entre les autorités géorgiennes et celles d'Ossétie du sud.

**DEVELOPPING EVENTS /  
REVUE DE PRESSE**

**AZERBAIJAN /  
AZERBAIDJAN**

**01/06/03 – U.S provides funds for  
Azerbaijani police - RFE/RL  
Newsline**

Under an agreement signed in Baku on 3 January, the United States will provide \$500,000 to enhance the potential for cooperation between the two countries' police forces, Turan reported. The funds are to be spent on developing a criminal-records system, improving forensic capacities, providing training for police and prosecutors, and counternarcotics training and equipment.

**01/08/03 – Turkish delegation  
visits Azerbaijan - RFE/RL  
NEWSLINE**

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, arrived in Baku on 7 January at the head of a large delegation, Russian and Azerbaijani agencies reported. (...)Erdogan said he hopes the Baku-Ceyhan export pipeline for Caspian oil can be completed before the planned date of 2005 and noted that the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas-export pipeline will offer Turkey the opportunity to buy Azerbaijani gas cheaply either for domestic consumption or reexport to Europe. Erdogan reaffirmed Ankara's support for Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict, expressing hope that talks between Aliyev and his Armenian counterpart Robert Kocharan aimed at resolving it will be successful, Turan reported.

**01/10/03 – Azeri social-democrats  
to back opposition party leader in  
Presidential polls - Ekho**

The cochairman of the Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, Zardust Alizada, has pledged to back the leader of the opposition Justice Party, Ilyas Ismayilov, in the forthcoming presidential elections. In his interview with Ekho newspaper, he said an alliance between the two parties was already in place and no disagreements could inhibit it. Touching on the opposition's chances to win the elections, he said that if opposition parties fail to reach agreement between themselves, they will have slim chances to succeed.

(.../...)The political situation in Azerbaijan is volatile. The establishment has amassed a fortune and wants to perpetuate this situation. But you should take into account that the situation is not stable and that there is strong social dissatisfaction. It is another issue whether the opposition will be able to reach agreement in order to successfully run in the presidential elections instead of running with their Lilliputian parties with slim chances.

**01/18/03 - Human Rights Watch  
points to human rights abuses in  
Azerbaijan in 2002 - Turan news  
agency**

In a report published in 2002, the well-known international human rights organization, Human Rights Watch, pointed to serious human rights violations in Azerbaijan. Among them, the report mentions that the police used weapons against the residents of Nardaran [riot village outside Baku] on 3-4 June. The law-enforcement bodies injured tens of people and killed one resident of this village who staged an action demanding a solution to their social problems. In the following days, the police arrested several villagers, apprehending some of them right in Nardaran. They also pointed a gun to a 5-year-old child, demanding that his grandfather (Cabrayil Alizada) surrender to the authorities.

On 15 September, the police beat up and detained journalists protesting against the closure of the magazines Monitor and Bakinskiy Bulvar.

The persecution of journalists continued despite promises made by [President] Heydar Aliyev at a

meeting with media chiefs. After resuming its activities in April, Monitor was banned by a court decision again following a lawsuit by the defence minister. The authorities created all kinds of obstacles to the Qaya press distributing company.

The presidential decree on protecting state secrets, which was assessed as a new type of censorship, caused a sharply negative reaction in the world and was repealed under international pressure.

The report assesses the 24 August constitutional referendum as an action to enable the 80-year-old president, Heydar Aliyev, to hand over power to his son after leaving the political arena. As a result of the action, in which, according to official information, 96 per cent of the people turned out to vote, the provision on parliamentary elections under the proportional system was removed from the constitution. Therefore, political parties were deprived of their right to run for elections with party lists. At the same time, the authorities continued persecuting opposition activists and many of them were arrested and detained by the police on various charges.

The report also says that the Azerbaijani authorities refused to help thousands of refugees from Chechnya, depriving them of any support in Azerbaijan and ousting them from the country.

Despite a number of legal documents (on the ombudsman) and the ratification of the international human rights convention, there are still political prisoners in Azerbaijan and the persecution of the independent media and political opponents is continuing. A session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [PACE] in Strasbourg described these violations of the basic norms of human rights as "shocking". The Azerbaijani authorities also made unsuccessful attempts to boycott the rapporteur of the PACE monitoring group.

**01/23/03 – Journalists again  
allege PKK presence in  
Azerbaijan - RFE/RL Newsline**

The editors of the opposition newspapers "Hurriyet" and "Yeni Musavat," Aydin Guliev and Rauf Arifoglu, told a press conference in Baku on 22 January that a Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) network,

including four training camps, exists in Azerbaijan. They named several Azerbaijani enterprises, including a bank, that they claimed that are controlled by the PKK. They said the Azerbaijani network includes Azerbaijani Kurds and a Turkish businessman of Kurdish origin and that it is part of a far broader organization that encompasses the entire CIS. They said there is one PKK training camp in Krasnodar Krai in southern Russia. The two editors rejected as untrue National Security Minister Namig Abbasov's 17 January denial that the PKK maintains a presence in Azerbaijan. Abbasov was responding to a statement made in Baku 10 days earlier by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party.(...)

**01/23/03 – Azerbaijani opposition journalists launch hunger strike - RFE/RL Newsline**

"Yeni Musavat" editor Arifoglu began a hunger strike on 22 January to protest the 12 lawsuits brought against the paper by representatives of the Azerbaijani authorities in recent months, Turan and Interfax reported. He said that, if his health permits, he will fast for one week and that other members of the paper's staff will join the protest on 23 January.

**01/23/03 – Azerbaijani President overturns justice Ministry ruling - RFE/RL Newsline**

President Heidar Aliev issued a decree on 22 January annulling the 13 January Justice Ministry ruling revoking the registration of the "progressive" wing of the divided Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (AHCP) and registering as the successor organization to the AHCP a party of the same name headed by Gudrat Gasankuliev. Aliev suggested that the ministry had failed to take into consideration relevant articles of the law on political parties. Other opposition parties, which are convinced that Gasankuliev's group is covertly supported by and cooperates with the Azerbaijani authorities, have protested the Justice Ministry's ruling as illegal.

**01/23/03 – U.S. congressman slams destruction of Armenian monuments in Azerbaijani exclave - RFE/RL Newsline**

U.S. Representative Frank Pallone (Democrat, New Jersey) has written to President Aliev deploring what Pallone termed "your government's deliberate destruction" of an Armenian cemetery in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan close to the border with Armenia, according to Arminfo on 21 January, as cited by Groong. "I formally request that your government not only cease this destruction, but also work with UNESCO to designate this cemetery as an international protected historical and cultural zone," Pallone continued. He said the destruction "undermines" Aliev's stated commitment to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Karabakh conflict. Pallone is co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian issues.

**01/28/03 – Azeri rights group demands release of captured soldier - ANS TV**

(.../...) The chairman of the committee for democracy and human rights, Cingiz Qanizada, stressed the importance of organizing joint actions by political parties and non-governmental organizations demanding that Elmaddin Abiyev be freed from captivity. He pledged that the committee would notify the Baku office of the International Committee of the Red Cross of its wish to visit Abiyev.

**01/29/03 – Court imposes new fine on embattled Azerbaijani opposition newspaper - RFE/RL Newsline –**

Baku's Sabail District Court has ruled in favor of the Azersun Holding in its libel suit against the opposition paper "Yeni Musavat" and ordered the paper to pay a fine of some \$100,000. Azersun was seeking damages of \$100 million in connection with three articles the newspaper published in November-December alleging the company has links with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Also on 28 January, several Azerbaijani editors and NGO heads staged a one-day hunger strike in solidarity with "Yeni Musavat" journalists, who began such a protest action last week against a series of such libel suits

that threaten to bankrupt the publication.

**01/29/03 – Three torture deaths reported in Azerbaijan in 2002 - RFE/RL Newsline**

In 2002, 75 people were tortured in Azerbaijan and three of them died as a result, Elchin Behbudov, who heads the public committee against torture, was quoted by the newspaper "Ekho" on 28 January as saying, Turan reported.

**02/04/03 – OSCE media representative concerned about continued harassment of media in Azerbaijan – News from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Freimut Duve, is alarmed by the continuing use of defamation suits against independent newspapers in Azerbaijan.

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Freimut Duve, expressed his alarm today at the continuing use of defamation suits against independent newspapers in Azerbaijan and the growing frustration of journalists there trying to deal with intensified pressure on the independent media. "I am concerned that the authorities in Azerbaijan, a member of the OSCE family which is publicly committed to democratic values, appear to be reluctant to take measures to change an unsatisfactory media situation in the country," Mr. Duve said. "In a democracy, writing about the activities of public servants is part of a journalist's professional duties. It is my firm belief that no special protection should be afforded to public officials. They should exercise a greater level of tolerance toward criticism than ordinary citizens."

(...)Several hundred journalists demonstrated in the streets of Baku on 12 December, and a number of journalists and human rights activists staged a hunger strike in Azerbaijan last month.

"I am also very disturbed by the growing use of libel legislation in a number of other OSCE participating States," Mr. Duve added. He said that he was considering sponsoring a project on the subject, including a possible roundtable to be held later in 2003.

**ARMENIA / ARMENIE****01/07/03 - Killing of Armenian TV boss condemned - The Guardian (UK)**

International press and broadcasting watchdogs have condemned the killing of the head of Armenia's leading television station as a blow to democracy.

(...) "Mr Naghdalian was dedicated to introducing fair and balanced reporting by the country's young public service broadcaster," said Arne Wessberg, the president of the European Broadcasting Union, in a statement today.

"His murder is an attack on freedom of speech and a blow to democracy," added Wessberg, who heads the largest association of professional broadcasters in the world.

Press watchdog Reporters Sans Frontieres also expressed its concern and called on the Armenian authorities to clarify details of the killing as soon as possible.

(...) "Those for whom a human life is of no value, who are restless at Armenia's stability and progress, who paid no heed to the festive mood of the people, have thrown down a gauntlet to the whole of Armenian society," said President Kocharian in a statement.

Naghdalian had chaired Armenia's Public Television & Radio Company since 2001 when it was set up to replace the previous state broadcaster.

It was the second attack on a leading Armenian media figure in recent months. In October Mark Grigorian, the deputy head of the Caucasus Institute for Mass Media, which provides journalism training in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, suffered head and lung injuries after a grenade exploded near him.(...)

**01/08/03 - Council of Europe condemns killing of leading media figure in Armenia**

Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, today strongly condemned the assassination of Tigran Naghdalian, Chairman of the Public TV and Radio Council in Armenia, and expressed his condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.

(...) "The killing of a leading media personality is not only a crime against that person, but an attack on

freedom of the media. Armenian public TV and radio are destined to play a crucial role in the democratic life of the country, especially in covering the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. I would like to pay particular tribute to Tigran Naghdalian's efforts to reform public broadcasting in Armenia and bring it into line with European standards on independent public service. I call on everybody concerned to continue his work in the same open-minded spirit," said the Secretary General. "This appalling and senseless act should not be allowed to disrupt the democratic process in Armenia," added Walter Schwimmer. "I call on the competent Armenian authorities to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation in order to bring those responsible to justice."(...)

**01/09/03 - Armenia Removes Anti-Gay Laws From Criminal Code - Gay.com UK**

The Armenian National Assembly has voted to adopt an updated criminal code on its second reading - removing an anti-gay law.

According to the Association of Gay and Lesbian Armenians of France the country has repealed article 116 of its criminal code which punished sex between men with up to 5 years in prison. Seven men were sentenced in Armenia for gay sex in 1996, 4 in 1997 and 4 in 1999.

In 2000 ILGA-Europe (an international NGO) lobbied the Council of Europe, demanding abolition of article 116 must be included in the list of pre-conditions to Armenia being considered to enter the European Community

**01/15/03 - Eleven candidates running for presidency in Armenia - Agence France Presse**

Eleven candidates will face off in the first round of a presidential vote on February 19 in Armenia, the central electoral commission said Wednesday.

Four others have been excluded by the commission from the race because they did not meet all the running conditions. Candidates include incumbent President Robert Kocharian, 48, plus a host of experienced politicians and newcomers to the political scene in this former Soviet Caucasus republic.

Forty-four-year-old Stepan Demirchian, the leader of the People's Party, entered politics when his father, Karen Demirchian, the National Assembly speaker, was killed in an attack in 1999.

Former prime minister and defense minister Vazguen Manukian, 57, is running on the National Democratic Party ticket for the third time.

Also running are former prime minister Aram Sargsian, head of the Republic Party and brother of assassinated prime minister Vazguen, the leader of the Democratic Party.

The Communist Party is being represented by its leader, Vladimir Darbinian, 71.

The Country and Honor Party, the National Understanding Party, the National Unity Party and the United Armenians Party are also fielding candidates5(...)

**. 01/20/03 - OSCE office for democratic institutions and human rights to observe preparation to elections of Armenian President - PanARMENIAN Net**

Experts of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights will observe the preparation and holding of the presidential elections planned February 19. As chief of the observation mission Peter Eicher said in Yerevan today, 26 European experts from 16 OSCE member countries served on it. Over 200 short-term observers to monitor the processes of voting and counting the votes will arrive in Armenia on the eve of the elections. "We will monitor the electoral and political campaign, mass media coverage of the elections and the deciding of electoral disputes," - P.Eicher said. The OSCE mission will publish the preliminary conclusion on the elections February 20, and the final report will be ready in a month.

**01/25/03 - Pace heard the report on freedom of expression in the media in Europe - Yerevan Press Club weekly newsletter**

On January 28 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe heard the report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education on freedom of expression in the media in Europe.

In the section on Armenia the main focus was placed on the defects of the RA broadcast legislation. In

particular, it tells about the situation formed after the announcement of the broadcast licensing competition results on April 2, 2002, when "A1+" and "Noyan Tapan" TV companies did not receive broadcast licenses. "A new tender for frequencies was announced by the National Commission on Television and Radio on October 15. The 40 day period for submitting bids means that it is doubtful if either of the TV channels, even if they are granted a license, will manage to go on air before the presidential elections in February", the report notes.

The documents quotes the joint statement of Yerevan Press Club and "Internews" non-governmental organization where the loss of frequencies by "A1+" and "Noyan Tapan" is blamed on the imperfect legislation, as it made it possible for the National Commission on Television and Radio to reshape the broadcasting sphere, ignoring the interests of the acting and established TV companies.

The PACE report notes that the RA Law "On Television and Radio", passed in October 2000, was found to be not satisfactory by Council of Europe experts and is criticized by media representatives, "in particular in so far as both the National Commission on Television and Radio and the Council of Public TV and Radio Company are directly appointed by the President". The rapporteurs also noted that in Resolution 1304 (2002) on the honoring of obligations and commitments by Armenia "the Assembly called on the authorities to amend the broadcast law without delay".

**01/27/03 - Gül restates Turkish government denialist propaganda at Council of Europe session - European Armenian Federation**

Turkish Prime Minister Abdullah Gul reaffirmed the Turkish Government's denialist policies regarding the Armenian Genocide at a January 27th address before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, reported the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy (formerly ANC of Europe.)

(...) Mr. François Rochebloine, (Democrat France) citing "the deep commitment to renewal" as revealed, according to him, by the election of the new Turkish government, asked if Turkey intends now to "clarify its past, especially

with regard to Armenia and the Armenian communities" by acknowledging "the annihilation, through genocide, of its Armenian population." Mr. Gül restated the denialist policies of former Turkish regimes, arguing that events took place during a time of war and denying the existence of any plan to annihilate the Armenian people. He went on to note that "Turkey helps Armenia," rejecting any notions that his country is responsible for poor relations with its neighbour. He concluded his remarks, stressing the need to "to focus on the future and forget the past."

"Beyond the usual denialist propaganda, what is striking in Mr. Gül's speech is his incapacity to objectively view history and to grasp how its denial has led to the current political deadlock," said Laurent Leylekian, executive director of the European Armenian Federation.

"Mr. Gül's remarks simply don't reflect reality: Armenians and non-Turkish minorities in general are second class citizens in an apartheid state. Turkey's concept of multiculturalism is based on surrender and coercion. Regarding the existence of habeas-corpus or religious tolerance which are supposed to prevail in Turkey, I suggest Mr. Gul informs Mr. Yusuf Akbulut of these facts. Mr. Akbulut, an Assyrian priest, was, in the past, physically threatened and jailed for having mentioned the Armenian Genocide of 1915. His church was vandalized in Diyarbakir, only two weeks ago," noted Leylekian.

"The claim that 'Turkey helps Armenia' is patently false. Turkey continues to act as a predator and rogue state by continuing its illegal blockade of Armenia. Those, who put their hopes in the new Young-Turks that pretend to be crypto-Islamists, have now understood that more than the current regime, the problem is the Turkish state itself, with its racist and bellicose doctrines," concluded Leylekian.

**01/28/03 - Armenian Genocide Commemorated at House of Lords on Holocaust Memorial Day - The Armenian Community (UK)**

The Armenian Genocide was commemorated at the House of Lords on Holocaust Memorial Day (27 Jan. 2003) with the launch of "British Parliamentary Debates on

the Armenian Genocide," just published by the Gomidas Institute. The event was sponsored by the British Armenian All Party Parliamentary Group and was chaired by Baroness Caroline Cox. The main speakers were Ara Sarafian and Lord Avebury. The ensuing discussions were lively, as historians, politicians, and members of the Houses of Parliament discussed the ongoing denial of the Armenian Genocide by the British Foreign Office.

The meeting ended on a positive note, as one of the speakers pointed out that there has been a major shift in Great Britain over the past two years. The Armenian Genocide is de facto recognised in Great Britain, with major public bodies, such as the BBC, Imperial War Museum, the Welsh National Assembly and the Home Office giving the 1915 events positive exposure in the last year alone.

**01/29/03 - Barred from running from president, Armenia's ex-foreign minister forms political party - Associated Press**

A former foreign minister of Armenia who was barred from running in next month's presidential race announced Wednesday that he had formed his own party to participate in parliamentary elections in the spring.

Raffi Hovannisian, originally from Fresno, California, became Armenia's first post-Soviet foreign minister in 1991, but did not become an Armenian citizen until a decade later when he gave up his U.S. citizenship. Election law requires candidates to have been citizens for at least 10 years, and Hovannisian lost a court battle seeking to have his citizenship dated from 1991.

Hovannisian said he formed the Heritage party to take part in May parliamentary elections and that 50,000 people had already joined.

"The new party will become a completely new political force in the country, which will revive people's faith in themselves," he said.

He said the party had not decided whether to back anyone in the presidential race. Eleven candidates, including incumbent Robert Kocharian, will be on the Feb. 19 ballot.

**01/30/03 - Opposition candidates in Armenia's presidential race accuse incumbent of unfair tactics - Associated Press Worldstream**

Representatives of four candidates in Armenia's upcoming presidential election accused incumbent Robert Kocharian of unfair tactics and pressure on voters during a meeting Thursday with European election observers.

"Armenian authorities are resorting to various forms of pressure on voters, coercing them to vote Feb. 19 for the current president," Agasi Arshakian, a representative of candidate Artashes Gegamian, told observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Peter Eicher, head of the OSCE mission, said after the meeting that he and his colleagues would study the charges presented by the candidates and discuss them with Armenian authorities. Central Election Commission chief Artak Sagradian said no major violations of election law had been registered during the campaign. However, he said the commission had heard some allegations that it would investigate(...)

**01/30/03 - Council of Europe Secretary General Walter Schwimmer warns against hate speech between Armenia and Azerbaijan - Council of Europe Press Release**

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe today voiced regret at the recent declaration on "ethnic incompatibility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis", made by President Kocharian of Armenia. "Recalling dark pages of European history will never be a good electoral strategy", underlined Walter Schwimmer in reference to the upcoming presidential elections in Armenia, scheduled for 19 February. Later in 2003, there will also be presidential elections in Azerbaijan. "I call on all candidates, both in Armenia and Azerbaijan, to refrain from bellicose or hate rhetoric", Walter Schwimmer said. "Upon accession to the Council of Europe, both countries committed themselves to a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict - and we take this commitment very seriously", declared the Secretary General of the 44-member-state Organisation.

"Europe, to which Armenia and Azerbaijan belong, begins with the acceptance of European diversity - be it ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic. Our dream is to preserve and enjoy diversity", Mr Schwimmer concluded.

## GEORGIA / GEORGIE

**01/09/03 - Georgian opposition figure murdered - RFE/RL Newsline**

Union of Patriots co-Chairman Badri Zarandia was shot dead by an unidentified gunman in a cafe in Zugdidi on 8 January, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported. The union was founded last fall on the basis of a merger of the former Mkhedrioni paramilitary formation with Zarandia and his supporters. Zarandia was a close associate of deceased former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

**01/13/03 - Who Will Seize Power in Georgia? - Georgian Times**

Who will make Sharadze emigrate? Sharadze's Black List of the non-Georgian politicians.

By Khatuna Kviralashvili

Guram Sharadze, MP, claims the anti-national and non-Georgian forces masked with the nationalist cover, will take the reins of power after the next parliamentary and presidential elections in Georgia. In the short run, Guram Sharadze is going to publicise the documents proving that Koba Davitashvili, key member of the National Movement is not Georgian by origin. Guram Sharadze asserts Davitashvili's forefathers, who were Mesropians and Jarezovs i.e. Armenians, changed their surnames into the Georgian-suffixed surnames of Mesropashvili and Janezashvili. Sharadze declares a war against the non-Georgian politicians. The GT spoke with Guram Sharadze.

GT: Mr. Sharadze, is the five-cross flag the only reason of your confrontation with the National Movement, or there are some more reasons?

GS: Yes, there really are some other reasons for sure. I know one thing: it

will be devastating for Georgia if the National Movement seizes the reins of power. The Tbilisi population has already made a gross mistake when it voted for the party in the local self-government elections. There is a vivid threat that the nationalists may take power through deceiving and making zombies out of people. I am ready to emigrate today. Maybe my emigration will awake Georgians and make Georgia evade this threat. GT: Why are you coming so ardently against the National Movement?

GS: First of all, we should deprive this party of its title, as it is completely anti-national.

GT: What is "anti-national" in their activity?

GS: Why do I call them anti-nationalists?! How may anybody consider this party national when it comes against Ilia Chavchavadze (a great Georgian statesman, who was sanctified for his great national deeds). Moreover, they don't even know anything about Ilia.

GT: You may have failed to see the portraits of Ilia Chavchavadze hanging in the office of the National Movement...

GS: As they have failed to reach anything, they have hung the photos of Ilia Chavchavadze everywhere. They have deprived us of nationalism. Saakashvili and his followers did their best to deprive us of our nationality as well.

Today they claim to be nationalists. They are people suffering from psychic and moral sclerosis. The Saakashvilis, Davitashvilis, Bekauris, Berdzenishvilis and etc. will ruin the state. This is why I fight against them.

GT: Quite recently, you have accused Koba Davitashvili of being a non-Georgian. You declared you held the documents to corroborate the accusation.

GS: Yes, this is true. In his personal file that he wrote about himself, you can read that the two Armenian surnames were also his forefathers'. His forefathers were Mesropian and Janezov and they changed their surnames into Janezashvili and Mesropashvili. I will touch some more issues later...

GT: Won't you publicise it now?

GS: No. I will not disclose it now. I will present one more document later.

As for Saakashvili, it is not me but lakob Gogebashvili (a great Georgian writer and a statesman, who contributed greatly to the creation of a modern Georgian

written language) wrote that Saakashvili are of Armenian origin: they come from Saakovs and Saakiants.

GT: Have you poked into the family-tree of Zurab Zhvania, former parliament speaker as well?

G.S: I am too busy to poke into the genealogy of politicians. I have my personal opinion on Berdzenishvili, Zhvania and some others but it is another matter. Currently, I am interested in Davitashvili and Saakashvili, who mask their interests under the cover of nationalists and pose grave threat to Georgia. We should not permit the so-called Nationalists to come into power.

GT: As far as we see, you don't have any doubts that the National Movement will seize power.

GS: Because they have already assumed power by winning seats in the Tbilisi City Council.

GT: But the Labour Party has won more votes than the National Movement. Are you not afraid that Labourers will take power?

GS: The Labour Party members are more honest and honourable people. The Nationalists are overly pushy politicians. They say Natelashvili, leader of the Labour Party, had forethought to concede the post of the City Council's head to Saakashvili. Saakashvili will go bust politically and Natelashvili will save himself for the Presidential post. But Natelashvili is being deceived and cheated. They will deprive him of the President's post as successfully as in this case. These rascals can deceive Natelashvili any time they want. But how can we trust false Georgians like Saakashvili and Davitashvili? They will lead Georgia to devastation. That is why I am fighting against assimilation and integration. By removing the national requisite in the Georgian passports, the anti-Georgian forces will take power masking under the Georgian nationality. Under the names and surnames of Georgians they will lead the anti-Georgian activity.

**01/14/03 - Georgian President sets conditions for renewing CIS peacekeepers' mandate - RFE/RL Newswire**

In his traditional Monday radio interview, Eduard Shevardnadze said on 13 January that he opposes extending the mandate of the Russian peacekeeping force deployed under the CIS aegis in the

Abkhaz conflict zone unless Russia halts the train service that recently resumed between the Russian Black Sea town of Sochi and Sukhum, capital of the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported. The peacekeepers' mandate expired on 31 December. A Georgian government delegation headed by Transport and Communications Minister Merab Adeishvili was scheduled to travel to Moscow on 14 January to discuss the rail link. Shevardnadze stressed he does not object to the resumption of rail traffic per se, but that it should be postponed until after the repatriation to Abkhazia of Georgian displaced persons who fled that republic during the 1992-93 war. In Moscow, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko on 13 January expressed the hope that Tbilisi will agree to extend the peacekeepers' mandate, Interfax reported. In Sukhum, Abkhaz Vice President Valerii Arshba said the Abkhaz leadership categorically opposes the peacekeepers' withdrawal, arguing they are a guarantee of peace and stability in the region, Interfax reported.

**01/15/03 - Georgian official admits terrorists underwent training in Pankisi - RFE/RL Newswire**

Georgian National Security Ministry spokesman Nika Laliashvili told journalists in Tbilisi on 14 January that a training camp for Chechen fighters and Arab mercenaries existed in the Pankisi Gorge until February 2002, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported. Laliashvili said that terrorists at the camp studied the manufacture of explosives and poisons, including ricin. But he said no link has been established between the terrorists who spent time in Pankisi and the people arrested last week in London on suspicion of manufacturing ricin. Britain's "Sunday Times" on 12 January posited such a link. Laliashvili also said that persons with connections to Al-Qaeda controlled the channeling of funds to the terrorists then based in Pankisi. He said there are no longer any terrorists in the gorge.

**01/16/03 - Georgian security official envisages NATO membership in 2006 - RFE/RL Newswire**

In an interview published on 15 January in "Vremya novostei," National Security Council Secretary Tedo Djaparidze said he believes Georgia could enter NATO in 2006. He said Georgia's aspiration to join the North Atlantic alliance is dictated by the need to "enter any organization that can guarantee Georgia's security on the path that it has chosen." Djaparidze also told Interfax on 15 January that he believes unifying the Black Sea and Baltic security systems would be advantageous in that it would give NATO "a connection with its flank commands in the north and south through Georgia and the Eastern European countries that recently joined the alliance."

**01/18/03 - Russia regrets Georgia's intention to close airspace for its planes - ITAR-TASS**

The Russian Foreign Ministry has expressed regret in connection with Georgia's intention to close its airspace for Russian planes and consider new restrictions on various supplies to Russian military bases not only in Georgia but also in Armenia.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said, "If this information is true, we cannot but regret what Georgia is doing". He believes this is "a unilateral solution to questions that are subject to negotiations between the two countries on military issues, the next round of which is scheduled for January or February of this year". In addition, the spokesman said, "Attempts by mass media to link these Georgia steps with passenger railway traffic between Sochi and Sukhumi are unjustified".

"These are questions of different levels", he added.

Yakovenko also noted "recent positive changes in Russian-Georgian relations, especially after the Kishinev meeting of the presidents of the two countries in October of last year".

The ministry expressed the hope that "this tendency will not be reversed by unilateral steps of the Georgian side".

Georgian National Security Council secretary Tedo Dzhaparidze told journalists earlier in the day that the

Council "will shortly consider the question of adopting adequate measures in connection with the Russian side's decision to open railway traffic between Sochi and Sukhumi".

At the same time, he denied foreign media reports claiming that in response to Russia's decision Tbilisi was going to close its airspace to Russian planes.

**01/21/03 – Opposition politicians accuse Georgian President of planning new war in Abkhazia...** - RFE/RL Newline

Speaking at a press conference in Tbilisi on 20 January, United Democrats leader Zurab Zhvania and National Movement head Mikhail Saakashvili accused President Shevardnadze of preparing to launch a new war in Abkhazia in order to create a pretext for postponing the parliamentary elections due this fall in which, they predicted, the opposition will defeat Shevardnadze's Union of Citizens of Georgia, Caucasus Press reported. In his traditional Monday radio broadcast on 20 January, Shevardnadze said that all efforts made in recent years to improve the competence of the Georgian military, including the Train and Equip program launched last year by the United States, were undertaken with the intention of bringing Abkhazia back under the control of the central Georgian government. Zhvania and Saakashvili declared their support for the Georgian veterans of the Abkhaz war who are currently on hunger strike outside the Russian Embassy in Tbilisi to demand the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping forces from the Abkhaz conflict zone. On 17 January, Zhvania had called on the Georgian authorities to render all possible to support to the Georgian guerrillas operating in the Abkhaz conflict zone and to include representatives of the Abkhaz government in exile in negotiations on resolving the Abkhaz conflict, Caucasus Press reported.

**... And call for his overthrow**

Georgian parliament deputy leader Djemal Gogotidze (Revival) has urged the Georgian displaced persons who since 6 January have blocked traffic across the bridge over the Inguri River to overthrow President Shevardnadze, Caucasus

Press reported on 20 January. Gogitidze argued "the main responsibility for losing Abkhazia lies with Shevardnadze.... We shall not win Abkhazia back as long as Shevardnadze is president." In his 20 January radio address, Shevardnadze admitted, as he has on previous occasions, that the August 1992 invasion of Abkhazia was a mistake he was powerless to prevent.

**01/23/03 – Georgian security council said against blockade of Russian bases** - Kavkasia-Press news agency

According to information available to Kavkasia-Press, the Georgian Security Council is unlikely to advise the Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze to impose a transport and communications blockade on the Russian military bases in Georgia.

Last night the staff of the Security Council met the Georgian ambassador to the USA, Levan Mikeladze, and representatives of the Ministry of Transport and Communications to converge positions on the issue. The Security Council intends to advise the president not to impose a blockade on the Russian bases as this step might lead to serious problems in the implementation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Supsa pipeline projects, a reliable source at the State Chancellery told Kavkasia-Press.

The Security Council admits that a strong Russian intelligence network is operating on Georgian territory. By activating this mechanism, Russia can stir up ethnic tension in Javakheti mainly ethnic Armenian-populated southern province of Georgia and create economic problems throughout Georgia.

The Security Council does not rule out the possibility that the blockade of the Russian bases in Georgia may lead to subversive acts on the Baku-Supsa pipeline despite the reinforced security of the pipeline. Considering all that, the Security Council will draw up recommendations for the president in the next few days and present them at a Security Council meeting at the end of the week.

The Security Council meeting has been deferred on two occasions recently. President Eduard Shevardnadze expects to get more information from parliament Speaker

Nino Burjanadze who is returning from Moscow tonight.

**01/27/02 - Russia, Georgia taking steps to build up common border security** - ITAR-TASS

Russia and Georgia have made important practical steps to implement a protocol their chief border officials signed in Yerevan, Armenia, last year, Colonel-General Konstantin Totski, commander of Russia's Federal Border Service, said Monday.

The protocol envisions communications between the Russian and Georgian border posts and exchange of data on what is happening in the areas adjoining the border, Gen Totski said. He admitted at the same time that 85 percent of the borderline ran through high mountainous terrain of the Caucasus, which made it impossible to organize joint patrolling there.

Gen Totski said that one of the practical measures under the protocol was to set up a joint battalion of crack troops with the task of making the Chechen section of Russo-Georgian border less penetrable for militants.

Borders troops of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are expected to have a joint exercise of headquarters staffs on the territory of Russia's constituent republic of Dagestan at the end of next month, Gen Totski said.

The exercise will last three days, in which time the troops will be preparing for operations on the border in the largely bushy mountainous areas. They will simulate, in part, joint patrol actions.

**01/27/03 – Georgian security Ministry declassifies materials on Pankisi Gorge** - RFE/RL Caucasus Report

The Georgian National Security Ministry has made public certain materials, including videotapes relating to the ongoing controversy over the presence in the Pankisi Gorge in northeastern Georgia of Chechen fighters and Arab terrorists with links to Al-Qaeda. Those materials, posted on the Civil Georgia website identify the Chechen field commanders who used the gorge as a base. And they reveal that Georgian, Russian, and U.S. intelligence and security officials cooperated closely throughout 2002 in determining the

identity of fighters based in Pankisi and their movements. But the documentation sheds no light on persistent rumors of possible complicity between senior Georgian officials and the Chechen fighters or on the current whereabouts of the fighters who used Pankisi as a base but are said to have left the region last fall shortly before the Georgian police launched their much-publicized cleanup operation. Nor does it provide any data that would substantiate suspicions that the four North Africans arrested in London on 5 January on suspicion of manufacturing ricin underwent training in manufacturing toxins in Pankisi.

The Chechen field commanders who used Pankisi are named as Ruslan Gelaev, Doku Umarov, Husein Esebaev, and "Batia." In addition, there was a fifth field commander named Amjet (Abu Hapsi), presumably an Arab, who was said to be close to Osama bin Laden. Georgian National Security Ministry spokesman Nika Laliashvili told Civil Georgia that it may have been Amjet who had a telephone conversation with bin Laden from the Pankisi Gorge on 11 September 2001. When the first media reports of that telephone conversation surfaced in September 2002, Laliashvili cast doubts on their veracity.

Laliashvili said that Amjet, together with "most" of the Chechen fighters, left Pankisi in August 2002. Beginning in mid-August, Georgian officials repeatedly announced that a sweep of the Pankisi Gorge to locate and apprehend criminal elements would be launched in the immediate future. Those announcements inclined analysts both in Russia and the West to hypothesize that some highly placed Georgian officials who had earlier colluded with the Chechens might have decided to give them advance warning to enable them to leave the gorge before the crackdown. On 17 January, the "Financial Times" quoted Georgian National Security Minister Valeri Khaburzanias as saying that up to 800 Arabs and Chechens were allowed to leave the gorge "without bloodshed" during that operation. Khaburzanias made a similar statement in Tokyo on 24 January. But a spokesman for the Russian forces in the North Caucasus denied

on 25 January that Gelaev and his fighters are currently in Russia. Laliashvili also provided details of how Arab religious emissaries who established Islamic schools and guerrilla training in the gorge were financed. He said that during last fall's cleanup operation, Georgian security operatives recovered from training camps run by the Arabs textbooks on how to build bombs and blow up residential buildings. He added that he does not exclude a possible connection between the London ricin find and Pankisi. "Time" magazine in its 22 October European edition quoted unidentified Georgian officials as saying that Arabs in Pankisi were preparing at least two terrorist attacks that were thwarted with U.S. assistance. One of those, according to the magazine's Georgian informants, involved a six-man team of chemists "engaged in brewing poisons to be used on Westerners in Central Asia." "Time" also quoted Georgian officials as saying that they cannot account for as many as 30 of the Arabs formerly based in Pankisi, including a man named Abu Iyad. Over the past two months, Georgian officials, including President Eduard Shevardnadze and National Security Minister Khaburzanias, have repeatedly said that either no, or only a handful of, Chechen fighters remain in Pankisi. But in the wake of the recent Western press speculation about a secret laboratory in the Pankisi Gorge for manufacturing toxins, Russian officials have renewed their media offensive, again accusing Georgia of being unable to contain the terrorist threat that, they claim, still emanates from Pankisi. Russian presidential aide Sergei Yastrzhembskii told journalists in Moscow on 16 January that the Pankisi Gorge "remains an international problem that requires permanent attention," despite the large-scale Georgian police operation conducted there last fall. Lieutenant General Valerii Putov, acting chief of the North Caucasus regional border-guard department, told Interfax on 24 January that: "We have information indicating that there are still Chechen rebels and foreign mercenaries in the Pankisi Gorge.... Some terrorists in the Pankisi Gorge pose as refugees, others hide their weapons and blend in with civilians, and the rest are hiding at disguised bases in the mountains, waiting for the spring to start their activities." On 23 January,

Russian Federal Border Service Director-General Konstantin Totkii likewise said that not all Chechen fighters left Pankisi last summer. He claimed that some have moved to bases higher in the mountains close to the Russian-Georgian border and that his service anticipates that those Chechens will attempt to cross the border into Russia as soon as the mountain passes are clear of snow.

**01/27/03 – Are Georgia and South Ossetia heading for peace or a new war ? - RFE/RL Caucasus Report - 01/27/2003**

Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, who is Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze's special envoy for the unresolved conflict between the Georgian government and the breakaway unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, met for five hours in Tskhinvali on 18 January with South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoyty to discuss possible approaches to resolving the decade-old conflict, Caucasus Press reported. The two men drafted confidence-building measures between the two sides and agreed to establish a joint committee to monitor implementation of those measures. The first session of the committee will take place in Tskhinvali in late January. Kokoyty and Rcheulishvili were quoted as saying after the 18 January talks that "the year 2003 has been designated the year of confidence building between the Georgian and Ossetian peoples."

An article published in the Georgian paper "Tribuna" on 23 January suggests, however, that their optimism may be misplaced. The paper reported that several tanks and 17 armored personnel carriers had been observed near the Ossetian village of Dodoeti. It claimed the convoy is commanded by a Russian officer. The paper quoted South Ossetian officials as explaining that the heavy armor is to participate in a training exercise under the aegis of the peacekeeping force deployed in South Ossetia. But unidentified Georgian experts suggested that the move may presage a new upsurge of hostilities. Parliamentary deputy Mamuka Areshidze suggested that Russian special services may be seeking to destabilize the situation in South Ossetia.

It is not clear whether there are grounds for such alarmist statements from the Georgian side. But the mere fact that such articles appear in the Georgian press testifies to the need for the confidence-building measures that Kokoyty and Rcheulishvili hope to implement.

**01/28/03 – Justice Ministry admits gas used in Georgian prison unrest - RFE/RL Newsline**

A Georgian Justice Ministry official admitted on 27 January that an unnamed gas was used to pacify inmates of a Tbilisi remand prison who clashed with Interior Ministry troops on 25 January, Caucasus Press reported. Earlier on 27 January, the ministry issued an official denial that any such gas was used. The chairman of an NGO to protect the interests of political prisoners claimed that 100 prisoners have been hospitalized, rather than some 35 as prison authorities claim. Also on 27 January, the Justice Ministry increased the penalties for negligence on the part of prison staff, Caucasus Press reported.

**01/29/03 – Georgian border-guard chief anticipates Gelaev incursion - RFE/RL Newsline**

Georgian State Border Service head Lieutenant General Valeri Chkheidze told the independent television station Rustavi-2 on 28 January that he believes the Russian military is setting the stage for an incursion into Georgia from Russian territory in May by Chechen field commander Ruslan Gelaev and his men, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported.

Chkheidze's Russian counterpart, Federal Border Guard Service Colonel General Konstantin Totskii, told journalists in Moscow on 27 January that, "as far as we know," Gelaev is currently in Chechnya.

***DAGHESTAN /  
DAGHESTAN***

**01/17/2003 - Chechen field commander sentenced for attacks in Daghestan – RFE/ RL**

Acceding to the prosecutor's request, the Criminal Cases Collegium of Daghestan's Supreme

Court sentenced Chechen field commander Zaur Akavov to life imprisonment on 16 January (...). Akavov and his six subordinates were found guilty of committing 13 terrorist acts in Daghestan between August 2001 and February 2002, including the bombing of a Russian military vehicle in January 2002 in which seven servicemen died (...). The other six men received prison terms ranging from seven to 22 years.

**01/20/2003 - Daghestan - Associated Press**

A military court in Makhachkala opened hearings against seven servicemen and a civilian charged with stealing and selling weapons and ammunition, including a powerful anti-personnel land mine similar to the one that killed 45 people at a military parade in May. (...) According to investigators, the central player in the operation was the head of the brigade's sapper unit, Lieutenant Colonel Nikolai Yamkovoi, who is accused of stealing seven land mines identical to the one used in the Victory Day bombing in the Dagestani town of Kaspiisk. In addition to the casualties, about 170 people were wounded in the attack. (...) Seven members of rebel leader Rappani Khalilov's group were convicted Thursday of carrying out 13 such attacks. The Dagestani Supreme Court handed them sentences ranging from seven years to life in prison. The other four servicemen (...) have been charged (...) only with illegal weapons sales not with complicity in the attack (...).

***ABKHAZIA / ABKHAZIE***

**01/10/03 – Russian Presidential envoy meets with Abkhaz leadership - RFE/RL Newsline**

Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy for the Abkhaz conflict, Valerii Loshchinin, met with senior Abkhaz leaders in Sukhum on 9 January, "The Georgian Times" and RIA-Novosti reported. The Russian envoy held talks with Abkhaz Prime Minister Gennadii Gagulia, Deputy Prime Minister Valerii Arshba, and Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba.

Russia is attempting to restart negotiations between the Abkhaz and Georgians that remain stalled

over the Abkhaz demand for a complete withdrawal of Georgian troops from the upper part of the Kodori Gorge as a precondition for talks. Georgian officials are also concerned over the Russian grant of citizenship to a number of Abkhaz residents, characterizing the act as "unacceptable."

**01/13/03 – UN envoy meets with Abkhaz Premier, Russia's Abkhaz mediator - RFE/RL Newsline**

Heidi Tagliavini, who is the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for the Abkhaz conflict, met in Sukhum on 10 January with Abkhaz Prime Minister Gennadii Gagulia and with Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loshchinin, who is Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy for Abkhazia, Caucasus Press reported.

Tagliavini discussed with Gagulia scheduling meetings of the Coordinating Council -- which was set up under UN auspices in 1997 to discuss issues related to the settlement of the Abkhaz conflict -- and of the so-called "Friends of the UN Secretary-General" group of five countries that seeks to promote a settlement. She also raised the possibility of a conference on confidence-building measures. The UN Security Council is to discuss the Abkhaz situation on 31 January. Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba said on 10 January that the Abkhaz leadership wants Loshchinin to explain its position to that session.

**01/22/03 – UN secretary-General assesses Abkhaz situation - RFE/RL Newsline**

In a 13 January letter to the UN Security Council, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed concern that minimal progress toward resolving the Abkhaz conflict has been made over the past six months. Annan announced that he will convene a "brainstorming session" of the five "friends of the secretary-general" countries soon to consider how to break the deadlock. Annan also called for the resumption of meetings of the UN-sponsored Coordinating Council that promotes confidence-building measures and for the extension for a further six months of the mandate of the UN Observer Force. Russian and Georgian news-agency reports on 21 January quoted Annan at a press conference the previous day as describing the Abkhaz as

obstructing the investigation into the shooting down over the Kodori Gorge in October 2001 of a UN-chartered, Ukrainian-owned helicopter. Nine people died in that crash. Abkhaz Defense Minister Raul Khadjimba told journalists in Sukhum on 21 January that the Abkhaz authorities have never prevented UN or Ukrainian officials from inspecting the crash site, although they refused to allow a Georgian team to do so.

**01/24/03 - Georgian, Abkhaz military prepare to take over peacekeeping functions in Abkhazia - RFE/RL Newsline -**

Meanwhile the Georgian Armed Forces General Staff has prepared a contingency plan to deploy Georgian troops "to maintain the status quo" in the Abkhaz conflict zone should the Russian peacekeeping contingent be withdrawn, Interfax and Caucasus Press quoted Deputy Defense Minister Gela Bezhuashvili as saying on 23 January. He did not divulge further details. On 21 January, Abkhaz Deputy Defense Minister Garri Kupalba told journalists in Sukhum that Abkhazia is ready to deploy its servicemen at the control posts currently manned by the Russian peacekeepers should that force be withdrawn, Caucasus Press reported.

**01/24/03 - OSCE officials visit Abkhazia - RFE/RL Newsline**

Representatives of the OSCE office in Georgia met on 23 January in Sukhum with Abkhaz parliament chairman Nugzar Ashuba to discuss the economic and social situation in the unrecognized republic and unspecified aspects of the ongoing search for a political solution to the conflict, Caucasus Press reported. Ashuba said such a solution depends primarily on the attitude of the five states that belong to the "Friends of the UN Secretary-General Group," one of which, Ashuba said, is biased in favor of Georgia. He was most likely referring to the United States. Meanwhile, Abkhaz President Vladislav Ardzinba's representative in Moscow, Igor Akhba, told RIA-Novosti that Georgian claims to have transferred international humanitarian aid to Abkhazia are "a blatant lie," and that Abkhazia "has not received a single cent" of such aid, Caucasus Press reported on 23 January.

**01/27/03 - Georgian official again demands UN peace-enforcement operation in Abkhazia - RFE/RL Newsline**

Tamaz Nadareishvili, who is chairman of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz parliament-in-exile, told journalists that he presented to the 26 January Security Council session a draft demand that the UN launch a peace-enforcement operation in Abkhazia and that the session agreed to submit that demand to the UN. Nadareishvili has been calling for several years for such an operation.

But a state chancellery official said that the draft document will not be considered at the 31 January Security Council meeting that is to focus on Abkhazia, Caucasus Press reported.

**01/28/03 - Georgia, Abkhazia trade fresh accusations - RFE/RL Newsline**

Abkhaz Vice President Valerii Arshba told journalists in Sukhum on 27 January that the Abkhaz leadership cannot rule out the possibility that Georgia might co-opt "international terrorists" to launch a new attempt at infiltrating the Kodori Gorge once snows there melt in April or May, Interfax and Caucasus Press reported. He claimed that some 1,000 armed men including members of the Georgian special forces, are encamped in the upper, Georgian-controlled reaches of the gorge. Also on 27 January, Abkhaz Defense Minister Raul Khadjimba discussed the Kodori situation with Major General Kazi Ashfaq Ahmed, who is the UN's chief military observer in Abkhazia, Caucasus Press reported.

Ashfaq proposed convening a session of the working group for military issues of the UN-sponsored Coordinating Committee to discuss the Kodori situation. Meanwhile in Tbilisi, Georgian Intelligence Service head Lieutenant General Avtandil Ioseliani said Abkhazia could serve as a base from which international terrorists could infiltrate Russia or Europe, Interfax reported. Ioseliani claimed that the Chechens who hijacked a Turkish ferry in the Black Sea in January 1996 are living legally in Abkhazia.

**01/30/03 - CIS summit fails to renew mandate of peacekeeping force in Abkhazia - RFE/RL Newsline**

CIS presidents failed during their informal summit in Kyiv on 29 January to extend for a further six months the mandate of the Russian peacekeeping force deployed since 1994 in the Abkhaz conflict zone, Russian and Georgian news agencies reported. As on previous occasions, Russian President Putin told journalists on 29 January that Russia will not insist on the peacekeepers remaining in Georgia if Tbilisi demands their withdrawal. The Georgian National Security Council on 26 January listed three conditions that Russia must meet before Georgia will agree to renewing the mandate, which expired on 31 December. U.S. envoy for the South Caucasus Rudolf Perina told Shevardnadze on 28 January that Washington does not recommend terminating the peacekeepers' mandate at this juncture, according to Caucasus Press. Shevardnadze for his part told journalists upon his return to Tbilisi on 29 January that a bilateral commission will study the National Security Council's demands and the expediency of extending the peacekeepers' mandate.

***NORTH OSSETIA /  
OSSETIE DU NORD***

**01/22/2003 - Human rights violation - Associated Press**

Chechen civilians continue to be abducted, beaten and killed by Russian security forces, an international human rights group said Wednesday, while about 20 Chechen women staged a protest in a neighboring republic in a bid to draw international attention to the plight of their relatives. (...) Russian troops insist that military abuses are not widespread, and that all such incidents are prosecuted. Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov told Russia's Echo of Moscow radio on Wednesday that 26 servicemen, including four officers, were convicted last year of crimes in

Chechnya (...). Chechen rebels are outnumbered and outgunned by Russian forces but regularly target Russian troops and Moscow-backed Chechen officials with mines, ambushes and hit-and-run attacks. Federal forces shelled suspected rebel positions in the Shali and Itum-Kale districts, and rounded up at least 120 people in security sweeps which are meant to root out rebels. (...)

## **SOUTH OSSETIA / OSSETIE DU SUD**

**01/17/03 - South Ossetia : furor  
over Chibirov arrest - Caucasus  
Reporting Service No. 162**

The detention of the son of the former president of the unrecognised republic of South Ossetia has intensified a political feud.

By Kosta Dzugaev in Tskhinval

Security service agents last week stopped Alexei Chibirov, the son of former elected leader of South Ossetia, as he was walking down a street in the capital Tskhinval and asked him to accompany them to their office for an interview.

When Chibirov refused, the servicemen forced him into their car and drove him to the KGB remand prison where he is still being held and declared a hunger strike on January 14.

The arrest has sparked probably the biggest political scandal in the unrecognised republic since it broke away from Georgia more than ten years ago. The detained man's father Ludwig Chibirov ruled South Ossetia from that time until December 2001, when he was ousted in a presidential poll by the current leader, Eduard Kokoity (who is also known by the Russianized surname Kokoyev).

According to investigator Nikolai Pukhayev, Alexei Chibirov faces several criminal charges, the most important of which relates to his former job. Until late 2001, Chibirov junior was deputy head of the republican KGB, the same agency that is now holding him in custody. "During the 2001 election campaign, Chibirov sent security service

officers to terrorize parliament chairman Stanislav Kochiev into withdrawing from the race," the investigator told journalists last week.

"Threats of murder were also made to parliamentary deputy Georgy Cheldiev."

Officials have not explained why they waited a year before bringing the charges, and former president Ludwig Chibirov told Prime News agency that his son was "being framed with ludicrous charges that can get him up to 20 years in prison." He went on, "They've been after him since the 2001 presidential election when Alexei openly challenged the current South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity."

In response, the South Ossetian leader told journalists, "There is nothing political about this and the situation that has arisen appears mainly to be a misunderstanding. The KGB just wanted to ask Alexei a couple of questions, but he misinterpreted their intentions."

Neutral observers regard the arrest as the latest chapter in a long-running political feud. It began mid-way through 2001, when an opposition first made its voice heard in South Ossetia, which hitherto had been fully united against the outside enemy, Georgia.

Two new opposition leaders both challenged Chibirov for the presidency.

One was local Communist Party leader Stanislav Kochiev, the other was Eduard Kokoity, a youthful former wrestling champion, who had no party allegiances and had just returned to Tskhinval from Moscow.

Few doubted the all-powerful Chibirov would emerge victorious from the fight, but in the event he received only 20 per cent of the vote and was knocked out of the first round of the contest altogether by Kokoity and Kochiev.

Ludwig Chibirov was clearly taken aback. The next day his son's armed supporters stormed into the parliament building to try and coerce Kochiev into withdrawing from the race and thus effectively invalidating the poll results.

"The standoff between Chibirov's and Kokoity's factions is now over," a Tskhinval-based political analyst,

who asked not to be named, told IWPR.

"Neither the older or the younger Chibirov have any influence anymore in South Ossetia." Other independent analysts, as well as South Ossetian officials, declined to comment.

Having lost the election, Ludwig Chibirov immediately left politics. He now lives in Vladikavkaz, south of Russia, working as a senior researcher in Caucasus history and ethnography at the local humanities institute and writing his memoirs.

Nonetheless, the analyst quoted earlier suggests that the arrest of Chibirov may be an attempt to wipe out the last traces of his father's political influence in the republic.

According to another theory, the KGB is trying to eliminate Chibirov junior's remaining connections inside the agency.

This theory is supported by the fact that several other arrests were made concurrently with Chibirov's, including the former head of the republic's riot police (or OMON) Merab Pukhaev. "Apparently, the new leadership has set out to purge its security forces and strengthen internal political control," the analyst told IWPR.

There has been speculation in the Georgian media that the detentions are a symptom of an all-out power struggle for control of South Ossetia's security services. Local officials deny this.

"There is nothing going on, the situation is perfectly calm and under control," OMON chief Murat Tedeev told IWPR. "We are working as normal."

However, South Ossetian government officials did announce last month that they are in possession of a video containing what they said was "major incriminating evidence against the former regime" and would be willing to air it on local television.

The video has never been shown and it's anyone's guess what it contains.

Rumours are rife in Tskhinval about the former government's financial mismanagement and criminal activity.

The authorities have apparently decided not to air the mysterious tape. At the moment it seems they believe that their predecessors are finished and that communist leader Kochiev is the only credible opposition force.

Kosta Dzugayev is director of the NGO, the Centre for Information Technology in Tskhinval, South Ossetia.

## **CHECHNYA / TCHETCHENIE**

### **01/03/03 - Could General Troshev become Chechnya's next president? - RFE RL**

On 18 December, Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed Colonel General Gennadii Troshev from his post as commander of the North Caucasus Military District, one day after Troshev publicly affirmed that he would not voluntarily agree to his announced appointment as head of the Trans-Baikal Military District (...). Troshev said that for him to leave Chechnya at this juncture would be a betrayal of the troops he commanded and of the Chechen people, who, according to Troshev, believe that the "antiterrorism" operation in Chechnya is nearing its end. (...). Although, he has consistently taken a hard line on a negotiated end to the fighting, ruling out any talks with either Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov or field commanders Shamil Basaev and Khattab. And in the summer of 2001 he incurred criticism for advocating that captured Chechen field commanders should be publicly executed. But at the same time, (...), Troshev "showed respect for the Chechens," opposed the use of gratuitous brutality during so-called "sweep" operations, and sought repeatedly to persuade village elders to deny support to the resistance, rather than launch reprisals against villages suspected of harboring Maskhadov's supporters. (...) Troshev is a prime candidate to succeed Gennadii Zyuganov as head of the People's Patriotic Union of Russia. Or, Troshev could run for the Chechen presidency. Kadyrov, who earlier made no secret of his aspiration to that post, (...) that if Troshev

decided to make a bid for the presidency, he would wish him luck and that he would be ready to work with him if he were elected.

### **01/17/03 - European court to address alleged Russian abuses in Chechnya - RFE/RL**

The European Court for Human Rights agreed on 16 January to hear the cases of six Chechens who claim their relatives were tortured or killed by Russian troops in 1999-2000, AP and the "Financial Times" reported. The court rejected the Russian government's argument that the plaintiffs have not exhausted all possibilities to address their grievances offered by the Russian legal system.

Russian human rights ombudsman for Chechnya Abdul-Khakim Sultygov rejected the court's decision as an attempt to exert pressure on Moscow on the eve of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) session that is to focus on Chechnya, Interfax reported. But Russian Human Rights ombudsman Oleg Mironov commented that "all citizens of Russia, including those of Chechnya, have the right to appeal to the European Court" and that Moscow will regard that court's ruling as binding, Interfax reported.

### **01/23/03 - Grozny blast divides Chechens - Institute for War & Peace Reporting**

A month after a powerful explosion ripped through Grozny, Chechens are no closer to identifying who was behind it. (...) The December 27 bombing (...) came just as the Kremlin and the pro-Moscow administration of Akhmad Kadyrov were claiming that Chechnya was now sufficiently stable to hold a new constitutional referendum in March. The referendum is still scheduled to go ahead, but human rights groups say that the Russian army has intensified its round-ups of suspected militants since the beginning of the year, arresting young men in areas such as Argun, Berdykele, Samashki, Gekhi, and Grozny itself. (...) There are already many different theories of what happened and why. According to an army spokesman in Chechnya Ilya Shabalkin, Arab mercenary Abu Walid and field commander Shamil Basaev were both involved in the attack. (...) For his part Akhmad

Kadyrov, head of Chechnya's pro-Russian administration claimed that "whoever is identified as the actual bombers". the person behind them is the ousted pro-independence president Aslan Maskhadov. (...) According to another version, told by Russian soldiers on duty at a checkpoint to their Chechen colleagues, the vehicles had number-plates from a Russian military base. They claim that the bombers had shown official documents, and had been let through.

However, many Chechens stick by the official explanation - and maintain that support for extremist fighters is falling among the population. At the same time there is still an overwhelming desire for Russian forces to leave the republic.

### **01/24/03 - Russia refuses to renew OSCE Chechen mission mandate - RFE/ RL**

Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who is the OSCE's new chairman-in-office, said he will try to persuade his Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov to agree to a new mandate for the mission. In his first address to the OSCE Permanent Council, de Hoop Scheffer on 13 January stressed the importance of the OSCE field missions as a source of firsthand information. "We have to dispel the notion that they could be perceived as liabilities," he added. However, Russia informed the OSCE last week that it has no interest in negotiating a new mandate for the OSCE office in Chechnya, which must now close by 21 March (...). The mission's mandate expired on 31 December, but the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands, (...) all urged Moscow to continue efforts to reach consensus on a new mandate (...)

### **01/30/2003 - PACE yields to Russian pressure over resolution on Chechnya - RFE /RL**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on 29 January amended the wording of a draft resolution on Chechnya, removing the demand supported by rapporteur Lord Frank Judd for postponing the planned 23 March referendum on a new Chechen constitution and election legislation (...). Instead, the final version of the resolution notes concern that "the necessary conditions for the holding of the

referendum may not be created by the stated date." Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Dmitrii Rogozin warned on 29 January that Moscow might demand Judd be replaced as rapporteur if he continues to advocate a postponement, adding that Judd "completely misunderstands" the situation in Chechnya (...). Interfax quoted Judd as saying he will continue to lobby for a postponement. Judd said again in Strasbourg on 29 January that the conditions set down by the PACE Political Committee for holding a referendum have not been created (...). He said holding the referendum before such political and security conditions are in place could prove "a terrible mistake."

### **NAGORNO KARABAKH/ HAUT KARABAGH**

**01/09/03 - Turkey suggest preconditions - RFE/RL NEWSLINE**

During his visit to Azerbaijan, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of Turkey's Justice and Development Party, has spoken on the relations between Armenia and Turkey. "Unless Armenia tries to improve its relations with Turkey, Turkey will not normalize its relations with Armenia," Erdogan said, according to Marmara, an Armenian newspaper published in Istanbul. Erdogan has presented the Azerbaijani leadership with his preconditions for improving relations with Armenia. According to Marmara, the leader of Turkey's governing party has said that "the Armenians should withdraw from Azerbaijani territories, Armenia should recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and finally, Armenians should stop insisting on recognizing the Armenian Genocide." Erdogan has also called for a quick settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, saying Turkey will accept the regulation that would be acceptable for Azerbaijan. He has also said that to make the settlement easier he is ready to work to resume the dialogue between the three foreign ministers.

**01/10/03 – Karabakh armed forces render harmless Azeri sabotage-reconnaissance group - Noyan Tapan**

On January 8, an Azeri sabotage-reconnaissance group tried to penetrate into Karabakh's territory overriding NKR defenses in the Aghdam direction of the contact line between the armed forces of Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan. The soldiers of the NKR Defense Armenia undertook all necessary actions to render harmless the terrorist group. According to the NKR Defense Ministry, one of the Azeri servicemen was wounded and taken prisoner, the rest of the saboteurs fled to the adjacent side. The representations of the OSCE and the International Committee of the Red Cross accredited to Nagorno Karabakh were informed of the incident.

**01/20/03 – Repentance will serve the cause of peace, participants in rally in memory of victims of Baku pogroms say - Noyan Tapan**

A rally organized by the "Veradarts Hayk" ("Return to Armenia") public organization was held in front of the monuments to the victims of the 1990 pogroms of Armenians in Baku on January 19. Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan, representatives of non-governmental organizations Fund Against Violation of Law, Association of Sport Veterans of Armenia, "Armenia - Our Home", "Ahazang" took part in the event. As Chairman of the "Veradarts Hayk" organization Robert Melik-Pashayev said in his speech, "this black page in the history of the multi-national city cannot be washed out." He emphasized that there is no being enemies all one's life, time is the best healer, but one should not forget about victims. "We are ready for cooperation that would help resolve conflicts, despite what had happened in Baku, but on condition that there will be repentance that the Azerbaijani people need," he said. Well-known writer and publicist Zory Balayan said that one must not hush up the events that happen in Baku: "It is an historical and legal fact that Armenians were killed only for their being Armenians. The pogroms again confirmed that today there is no return to the Stalin times when one nation was entitled to command over the other. In our case, the hangman was allowed to command the victim." According to him, the

world must realize that the hangman and the victim cannot come together within one state. Vladimir Movsisian, who led the government structure attending to refugees' problems during the first years said that a "dirty handwriting" of those who plotted the Armenian Genocide in 1915 in Turkey is seen in the tragic events in Baku. He also pointed out that the massacre of Armenians in Baku became a repetition of events in Sumgait and Kirovobad in 1988. "What was committed has nothing to do with civilization. We are thankful to the countries that realizing that the very notion "genocide" must be excluded from human relations, recognized the Armenian Genocide of 1915, and we feel sorry that the states that have not recognized genocide do not understand this problem," said Movsisian, stressing that terrorism today is a continuation of the past.

**01/30/03 - Armenian soldier killed in disputed Nagorno-Karabakh enclave - Agence France Presse**

An Armenian soldier patrolling the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh was killed by Azeri forces, the enclave's defense ministry said Thursday. "This criminal act was carried out around three hours after a monitoring carried out the same day by an OSCE mission," the ministry said in a statement. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is monitoring the tense situation in the region and has set up a group charged with finding a solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed enclave.

The attack on Tuesday was "a gross violation of the ceasefire regime" that has been effect since 1994, the defense ministry said. Azeri forces also attempted to enter the ethnic Armenian enclave on January 8, and one soldier was hurt and another captured in the attack, the ministry said(...)

**01/31/03 – NKR President decides to hand over pow Abiev with NKR ICRC mediation - Noyan Tapan**

The issue of the Azeri army soldier Elmeddin Abiev, taken prisoner on the front-line of the Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijani troops, was discussed during a phone conversation between the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin

Il and NKR President Arkady Ghukasian on January 30.

The NKR State Commission on Prisoners-of-War, Hostages and Missing Persons Affairs received an official request dated January 31 from the International Committee of the Red Cross Stepanakert Office to hand over the Azeri soldier in compliance with the agreement reached by all the parties involved", a spokesman for the NKR president told Noyan Tapan.

The NKR president took a decision to conduct the handover of the prisoner-of-war Abieve to the Azeri party through the mediation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Nagorno Karabakh.

### **INGUSHETIA / INGOUCHIE**

#### **01/08/03 - Another suspect apprehended in Chechen officia's murder – RFE/RL**

In a joint operation, Chechen and Ingushetian police arrested Visadi Shakarov, a suspect in the September 2002 murder of Nadterechnyi Raion administrator Akhmed Zavgaev, at a camp in Ingushetia for displaced persons from Chechnya, (...). One of Shakarov's associates, Ayub Tontoev, was reportedly killed by police while resisting arrest. Chechen police detained one suspect in the case, Visit Baigeriev, in Ingushetia's Malgobek Raion last November.

### **KRASNODAR REGION / REGION DE KRASNODAR**

#### **01/14/03 – Cossacks, police clash in Krasnodar – RFE/RL**

An unspecified number of Cossacks in the Leningrad Raion of Krasnodar Krai have been participating in pickets and meetings to protest the recent arrest of Viktor Bradulo, the ataman for the Umanskii Cossack Station(...). Bradulo is accused of acting as the intermediary in conveying a bribe of 400 rubles (\$13).

Local Cossacks told RFE/RL they believe Bradulo's arrest is linked with a conflict between the Cossacks and local police. The Cossacks say they have been delivering poachers from Cossack-

controlled forests to the police, who have not been prosecuting them. In addition, the Cossacks claim to have destroyed 10,000 plants from which unspecified narcotics are extracted. However, they say, local police were protecting the drug dealers, because they were getting a share of the profits. To protest his arrest, Bradulo has declared a hunger strike.

#### **01/19/2003 - Armenia ready to boost cooperation with Russia - ITAR-TASS**

Armenian President Robert Kocharyan said his country is full of determination to enhance economic cooperation with Russia's Krasnodar Territory, its closest neighbour in the North Caucasus. Speaking at a press conference in Krasnodar where he made a brief stopover on Saturday on his way back home, Kocharyan said, "there are all grounds for such dynamic cooperation". Krasnodar Territory has a strong economy and a population of more than 500,000. A large group of organisations fully financed by Armenian investors has been created and successfully operates in the region. Kocharyan held negotiations with Krasnodar Territory governor Alexander Tkachev, the heads of various departments and agencies to discuss the development of bilateral business relations(...)

### **DOCUMENTS**

#### **01/09/03 – OSCE under fire in Azerbaijan...**

On past performance, holding free, fair, and democratic elections is not one of the Azerbaijani leadership's strong points. Both the November 1995 parliamentary poll and the October 1998 presidential election were marred by egregious fraud. For that reason, in the summer of 2000 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) worked with both the Central Election Commission (CEC) and Azerbaijani opposition parties in an attempt to secure the passage of legislation that would minimize the possibility of fraud during the parliamentary elections scheduled for November of that year.

ODIHR succeeded in persuading the Azerbaijani leadership to amend the law on the CEC to increase

opposition representation. And apparently under U.S. pressure, shortly before the ballot President Heidar Aliev asked the CEC, first to reverse an earlier decision to bar all but five of the political that applied to contest the ballot under the party-list system from doing so, and then to register all candidates who had applied for registration to run in single-mandate constituencies.

Yet despite the amended election legislation, the ballot turned out, in the words of ODIHR Director Gerard Stoudmann, to be "a crash course in various types of manipulation," and all leading opposition parties rejected the official returns as falsified.

Hoping to avoid a further such embarrassing debacle during the presidential elections due in October 2003, in early 2002 ODIHR urged the Azerbaijani authorities to draft completely new election legislation. At the same time the opposition appealed to the UN to oversee the conduct of the 2003 presidential ballot. The opposition had addressed a similar request to the UN in the run-up to the 2000 parliamentary elections; but on both occasions, the UN responded that it can undertake such oversight duties only if requested by the Azerbaijani authorities to do so.

At some time in mid-2002, the Azerbaijani authorities submitted to ODIHR and to the Council of Europe's Venice Commission what Stoudmann subsequently described as "a very preliminary draft" of the new election code, which, he predicted, would duly be revised and discussed with political parties and NGOs. In a 9 July press release, Stoudmann said the OSCE would make public its comments on the draft and that the organization's Baku office would convene a series of roundtable discussions of it. But subsequent moves by the Azerbaijani authorities called into question its commitment to making the election process truly democratic. In mid-June, President Aliev scheduled for 24 August a referendum on 39 separate amendments to the Azerbaijani Constitution. The opposition construed two of those planned amendments in particular as intended to undercut the opposition's chances in future ballots. One provided for deputies to future parliaments to be elected only in single-mandate constituencies and not according to the proportional system, while the

second reduced the minimum number of votes a candidate must receive in the first round to be elected president from two-thirds of all votes cast to 50 percent plus one vote.

Both the OSCE and the U.S. administration expressed concern that the amendments were too complex to allow for a comprehensive public discussion in the comparatively short period of time available, but Aliiev rejected calls to postpone the referendum. The 24 August voting was marred by the same sort of massive violations (ballot-box stuffing, voter-list manipulation, multiple voting) that had become routine during earlier votes, leading U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher to comment, "We are concerned that this referendum...did very little to advance democratization or to lay the groundwork for presidential elections in the fall of 2003 that can meet international standards." Proceeding on the assumption that the draft election code would be published for public discussion in mid-November, the OSCE's office in Baku announced in mid-October that its first roundtable discussion of that draft would take place in the first fortnight of December. On 8 November, four Azerbaijani opposition parties appealed to the OSCE to pressure the Azerbaijani leadership to publish the amended draft immediately in order to ensure that it would be formally adopted no later than 1 February. (The Council of Europe's Venice Commission advocated passing the election legislation no later than six months prior to the ballot.) When the 200-page draft was finally unveiled on 2 December, however, opposition politicians swiftly condemned it as "even more reactionary" than the previous legislation.

The opposition was particularly incensed by the proposed composition of the CEC. Zerkalo.az on 11 December quoted Azerbaijan National Independence Party (AMIP) political council member Fuad Agaev, a trained lawyer, as explaining that under the 2000 legislation opposition parties represented in parliament by deputies elected under the proportional system were entitled to select six of the 18 CEC members. Under the new legislation, however, those six positions on the CEC would be shared among all minority parties represented in parliament,

including those that support the current authorities, thus reducing the opposition representation. In addition, three judges (who are appointed by the president) will also sit on the CEC, increasing its membership to 21. That provision, Agaev went on to argue, is only one of several that violate the provisions of the (amended) constitution. In addition, the new draft abolishes the minimum required turnout of 25 percent of registered voters which means, according to Agaev, that hypothetically a candidate could be elected president even if only a few dozen people voted for him. He called for the creation of a working group to bring the draft into line with the constitution.

But the opposition's anger was not directed only at the authors of the new draft legislation. Meeting in Baku on 11 December, nine opposition parties aligned in the so-called Opposition Coordinating Center decided to boycott the OSCE roundtable discussion of the draft legislation scheduled for 16-17 December to protest the format of that gathering, which envisaged a lengthy presentation by the authorities to be followed by five-minute comments by other participants. AMIP Chairman Etibar Mamedov and Ali Kerimli, head of the "reformist" wing of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (AHCP), both criticized the OSCE mission for failing to fulfill its mandate and for ignoring opposition suggestions on how to organize the proposed roundtable.

Talks on 13-14 December between two OSCE officials and representatives of AMIP, Kerimli's wing of the AHCP, and the Democratic Party failed to resolve the standoff. The opposition reportedly set four conditions for participating in the roundtable: that the authorities and opposition be equally represented, that the opposition be represented on working groups established to amend the draft electoral code, that the roundtable be broadcast in full, and that a "conciliation commission" be set up, on which the opposition would be represented, to seek a consensus with the Azerbaijani leadership on disputed articles of the Election Code. Shahin Aliiev, who heads the legal department within the presidential administration, said on 16 December that the authorities had agreed to the first three conditions but rejected the proposed

conciliation commission. He argued that there is no need for such a body, given that the opposition has the opportunity to present its proposals at the OSCE-moderated roundtable. The roundtable duly took place as scheduled on 16-17 December without any opposition representation. Also on 16 December, ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission released a "Joint Revised Preliminary Assessment of the revised Draft Election Code of the Azerbaijan Republic." That assessment contained comments on 210 separate articles of the code, terming it "cumbersome, complicated, and repetitive," shortcomings which it claimed increase the likelihood of "technical violations." At a meeting of the Opposition Coordinating Council on 26 December, Musavat Party Deputy Chairman Arif Hajily said the opposition has proposed a total of 136 amendments to the draft electoral code, and may come up with more.

On 18 December, ODIHR issued a statement regretting the opposition boycott of the roundtable discussion, but simultaneously expressing support for the opposition's proposal to establish a conciliation commission. Presidential administration official Shahin Aliiev immediately expressed his disapproval of the OSCE expression of support for creating such a body, and "525 gazeti" on 27 December quoted Bahar Muradova, deputy executive secretary of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, as rejecting it as unacceptable. But "Ekho" on 3 January quoted Ali Akhmedov, the ruling party's executive secretary, as having approved the proposal.

But the proposed conciliation commission has already given rise to a new dispute between the authorities and the opposition, this time over its composition. The opposition initially demanded equal representation on the commission with the authorities. The OSCE for its part proposed that the commission include all eight parties that polled at least 1 percent of the proportional vote in the parliamentary elections in 2000 be represented. But several small pro-government parties that failed to poll that minimum rejected that suggestion at a 7 January meeting as unfair, whereupon presidential administration official Ali Hasanov suggested that four small parties

that won seats in single-mandate constituencies (three of them pro-government) also be included. The OSCE's Baku office is continuing its efforts to promote a consensus on the composition of the commission. But it has been subjected to repeated criticism from both the opposition and the independent press for not supporting the opposition cause more wholeheartedly. On 8 January, zerkalo.az noted that the OSCE staffers invariably consult the Azerbaijani authorities, but not the opposition, before making public their new proposals.

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